

Mexico's Great Empire

The Aztecs settled in Mexico in the 1200s A.D. Their capital, Tenochtitlán, was located on the site of present-day Mexico City. The Aztecs built temples, public buildings, and houses on an island in the center of Lake Texcoco. They connected the city to the mainland using causeways, or large bridges. The Aztecs developed a huge empire that lasted for 300 years.

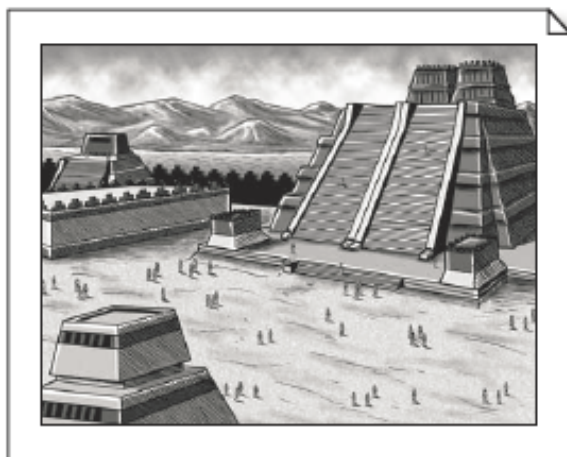
Much of present-day central Mexico was ruled by the Aztecs. They were great warriors and easily took over the communities around them. Each conquered community had to pay tribute, or give goods and money, to the Aztec emperor. In return, the communities received protection from the Aztec ruler. By 1500, more than 5 million Aztecs lived in Mexico. With a population of 200,000 people, Tenochtitlán was larger than any European capital.

The Aztec emperor had absolute, or complete, power. He lived in a beautiful palace, and visitors had to treat him like a god. Soldiers, government officials, and priests stood at the top of the Aztec society. Indentured servants and slaves made up the lower classes. Although the Aztecs had class divisions, a person could improve his or her status in society. Showing courage in battle was the best way to better one's social position.

Because they controlled a large trade network, the Aztecs enjoyed a strong economy. Merchants brought products from faraway places to the market at Tenochtitlán. Many products could be bought at the market, including food, clothes, gold, silver, precious stones, and leather.

Religion was very important to the Aztecs, and they believed in many gods. Thousands of human sacrifices were made to the sun god. The Aztecs believed that these sacrifices would delay the end of the world. Quetzalcoatl was another Aztec god. The Aztecs thought that Quetzalcoatl had left Mexico. They believed that one day he would come back to bring a time of peace.

In 1519, Spanish *conquistadors*, or conquerors, arrived in Tenochtitlán. The Aztec emperor, Montezuma II, believed the Spanish were representatives of Quetzalcoatl and welcomed them. The Spaniards saw the wealth of the Aztecs and wanted it for themselves. They took Montezuma hostage and looted the city. By 1521, the Spanish had destroyed Tenochtitlán and ended the Aztec Empire.

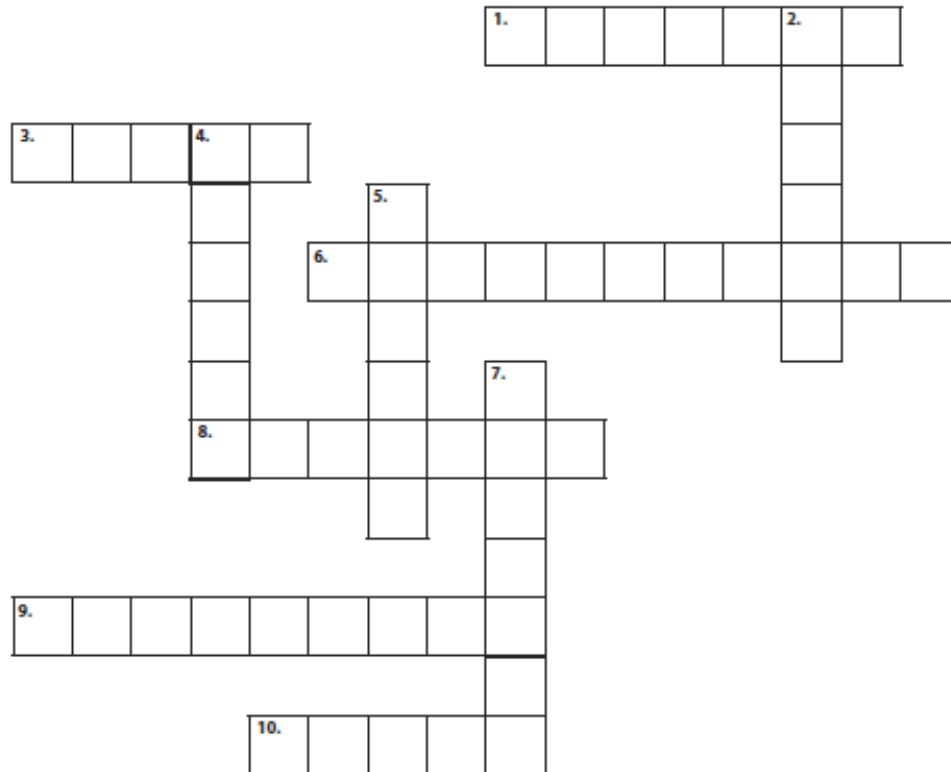




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Crossword Puzzle

Write the best answer in each blank, and complete the crossword puzzle.



ACROSS

1. The Aztecs believed the _____ were representatives of Quetzalcoatl.
3. By 1521, the Spanish had destroyed Tenochtitlán and ended the _____ Empire.
6. The Aztecs built their capital on an island in the center of _____.
8. The Aztec _____ lived in a beautiful palace, and visitors had to treat him like a god.
9. The Spanish took _____ hostage and looted the city of Tenochtitlán.
10. The Aztecs controlled a large _____ network.

DOWN

2. Thousands of human sacrifices were made to the _____.
4. The Aztec _____ lasted for 300 years.
5. The Aztecs had a/an _____ where many products could be bought.
7. Showing _____ in battle was the best way to better one's social position in Aztec society.